

## People Making a Difference in Columbia Falls

*Shayne Hatfield*

*Vice President, First Best Place Task Force Steering Committee*

*Owner, Glacier Service & Testing and Glacier Clean Carwash*

The First Best Place is a grassroots organization building quality of life amenities for their community, which is Columbia Falls and the surrounding area. First Best Place is dedicated to maintaining the unique small-town character of the area, while seeking to build on opportunities for outdoor adventure and economic prosperity. The trails committee is focused on trails (for pedestrians and bicycles) that link the parks and the town with Flathead River.

The Columbia Falls Riverwalk Trail group built a walking path linking the historic Red Bridge—built in 1911—with the Cedar Pointe subdivision on South Nucleus. The trail hugs the high-water mark of the river giving trail users a wonderful waterside experience while minimizing impact on the riverbank. Starting at the Red Bridge, this portion of the trail—the Kreck Trail—was made possible by a generous donation

of a long easement across the property of Dr. Loren Kreck. The Red Bridge was closed to motorized traffic in 1989, but remained a footbridge until it was eventually closed completely and the approaches were removed. With support from the City of Columbia Falls, Flathead County, the Montana Department of Transportation, the Safe Routes to Schools program, and Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) funding, the First Best Place Task Force is working to revitalize the bridge as a footbridge. Recently, the group received a commitment of \$500,000 from Flathead County for the project.

In addition to the trails project, First Best Place has created *Glacier Discovery Square*: a world-class community and visitor resource on the original Columbia Falls town square; a series of Community Renaissance activities with a goal of foster-

ing economic recovery and growth while preserving historic resources and protecting the town's connection to the natural world around it; and a number of other projects focused on education, preserving/displaying local history, and providing a connection point for the entire community. Shayne became involved with First Best Place to contribute to the revitalization of Columbia Falls, worked closely with Dr. Kreck on the Kreck Trail portion of the project, and looks forward to helping with the Red Bridge revival for both its historic value and importance to the community.

First Best Place  
[www.firstbestplace.org](http://www.firstbestplace.org)  
406.892.1363

Source: First Best Place, 2010



*The historic Red Bridge, Columbia Falls, Montana*